

Mister Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

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My name is Alfredo Waldo Forti. I was born in Cordoba, Argentina, in 1960. Currently I am an ESL student.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the distinguished members of the Subcommittee on the circumstances of my detention, that of my brothers and my mother and the subsequent disappearance of my mother Mrs. Nelida Azucena Sosa de Forti.

At the time of my detention I was 16 years old. I do not and never did belong to any political party or movement. I can say the same of my parents. I will then speak in the name of my family only. The circumstances of our detention and the disappearance of my mother had been extensively documented, and are described in detail in the Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina of the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights, under case number 2271 (pp. 91-98, English version text). I will therefore give only a brief summary of the facts.

Statement of facts

On February 18, 1977 my mother, brothers (aged 8-13) and myself boarded Aerolineas Argentinas flight 284 to Caracas, Venezuela in order to join my father, a surgeon, who accepted a contract with the Venezuelan Government to work as doctor for a Corporation. My father had left Argentina in January, to arrange for the arrival of the family. We had all the necessary documents, including parental consent and the family visa, officially communicated to the Venezuelan Consulate in Buenos Aires on February 14, 1977, in official telegram number 003410. In full view of passengers, crew, and the captain of the aircraft Mr. Gomez Villafañe, a uniformed Air Force officer and two immigration officers boarded the plane and ordered us to disembark. In the presence of the Federal

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U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/TPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(✓) Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s): _____

Declassify: () In Part () In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

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Police we were placed in waiting cars and taken out of the airport. The uniformed officers were with us only until we were on the plane, once on the ground we were handed over to persons in civilian clothes, presumably security agents. We were blindfolded and taken to a prison establishment, where we were kept captive for seven days. The only explanation given to us for being detained was that "there was a problem with our documentation", at no time did anybody show any authorization.

On the seventh day, my brothers and me were separated from our mother and abandoned in Buenos Aires. We were told by a person who appeared to be the leader, that our mother would be taken to Tucuman and that we will be reunited with her in a week. We had no news of my mother's whereabouts since that time. 20 days after we were released we were able to join my father in Caracas thanks mainly to the efforts of Alfonso Naldi, a Venezuelan priest.

Actions taken to discover the whereabouts and to gain the release of my mother

Writs of Habeas Corpus on behalf of my mother have been presented by my father and also by my grandmother to the competent Argentine authorities. All of these petitions produced absolutely no results.

In addition to the petitions of Habeas Corpus my mother's disappearance was denounced to several dependencies of the Armed Forces in Buenos Aires, Tucuman and Cordoba, to the Federal Police and the Minister of the Interior, as well as to authorities of the Catholic Church in Argentina, such as Archbishop Aramburu and the Papal Nuncio, Msgr. Pio Laghi.

Since none of these actions resulted in the knowledge of the fate of my mother, we have also denounced her disappearance to international legal and human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Commission of the United Nations and the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States.

In a note of September 29, 1977, the Government of Argentina replied to a request of information made by the I.A.C.H.R. that it had no record of the detention of Mrs. Forti and that she was the subject of a police search by the Ministry of the Interior. On November 18, 1978, the I.A.C.H.R. resolved that there was sufficient evidence to show that my mother, brothers and myself were illegally detained by agents of the Argentine Government and that my mother has not reappeared. It also recommended, that the Argentine Government take immediate measures to release my mother, and inform the Commission within a maximum of 30 days as to the measures taken to implement these recommendations.

Almost a year later the Argentine Government replied to this resolution in a note dated October 17, 1979. In its reply the Argentine Government did not deny the facts surrounding our detention and the disappearance of my mother. It did, however, attribute it to the work of subversive groups. No evidence in this sense has ever been produced and the I.A.C.H.R. has also received testimony from a detainee, who declared that among the many persons with whom he was detained in Tucuman was my mother. After a careful examination of the reply of the Argentine Government, the I.A.C.H.R. decided that it failed to provide significant information on the fate suffered by my mother and included the resolution referred to above in its Annual Report to the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, issued on April 11, 1980.

The impossibility of obtaining any information about my mother led us to appeal for help to agencies of other governments, professional organizations and ecclesiastic authorities. The appeals made in her behalf by these and by others are too numerous to list here. I only wish to note that a letter of concern on behalf of my mother was sent to Gral. Videla, then President of Argentina by two US Senator and 25 Members of Congress on June 30, 1978. A similar letter, signed this time by a US Senator and 32 Members of Congress was sent again to President Videla on March 15, 1979. To my knowledge, no reply to these letters has been received to date. I wish to take this opportunity to

personally thank several of the Members of this Subcommittee who signed these letters and who are present today.

I have related here our long, and so far fruitless efforts to locate my mother. I cannot accept the refusal of the Argentine Government to provide information on her. I do believe that my mother is alive, and will continue to believe so, until the contrary is shown to be true. I believe in the idea of justice, and will take every available opportunity to ask for help in locating my mother, in finding out what happened to her, in recovering her.

I wish to add only a few words. The case of my mother is not unique. There are thousands and thousands of disappeared persons in Argentina. Because of what I and my family have been through, I know that their feelings are similar to mine.

I am aware Mr. Chairman, that the object of this Hearing is to discuss the Restoration of Military Assistance to the Government of my country. As an Argentine, I prefer not to take a position on a matter that is for the U.S. Congress to decide. My purpose in coming here today is to bring to the attention of the Hon. Members the plight of my mother and of the thousands of Argentines who are still being held by the Government without any acknowledgment to their children or their parents. I hope this important discussion will prompt this Congress and the civilized people of the world to express the concern and renew their efforts to bring back my mother and all other "desaparecidos" alive to their loved ones.

THANKS YOU VERY MUCH


Alfredo Waldo Forti